

astrological-cultural-spiritual-political
views & commentary...

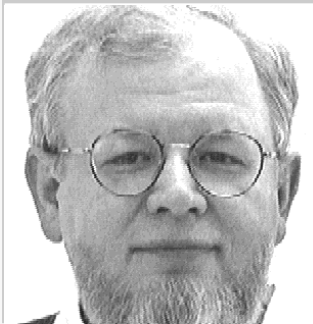
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THE HERBST NEWSLETTER



Thoughts, dates, & reminders about our lives as members of the craziest species on this lovely planet. Like a message in a bottle washing up on the sandy shores of consciousness...

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Dear friends,

This month's commentary is the conclusion of a two-part essay on one particular aspect of the 1960s, exploring the connection between that decade's chaotic Cultural Revolution in China and similar possibilities upcoming in America and the world during 2008-2015.

In astrological events closer to the here-and-now, we've been in the shadow set-up phase of a Mercury retrograde since February 16th. Mercury will then appear to move backwards from March 2nd through March 24th, this time in Pisces. The intensity of this first month of spring is increased by a lunar eclipse on March 14th followed by a solar eclipse on March 29th. So shy away from major decisions, work to clean up old or unfinished business, and allow fate to guide you toward new or more magnetic connections with others.

CHAOS IN THE 1960S (PART TWO)

Last month, at the end of Part One of this essay, I posed three questions:

1. *Why was China's youth upheaval in the 1960s so much more extreme than America's?*
2. *What does the Cultural Revolution teach us about the Uranus-Pluto cycle and the coming next phase of that cycle in 2008-2015?*
3. *Are the chaos and violence of China's Cultural Revolution the legacy to which we must look forward with anxiety?*

Before I address these questions, it may be useful to define again the two time periods—one past and one future—that are the central subject of this series of essays.

PAST AS PROLOGUE

What most people think of as "the 1960s" does not quite align with the actual years of that decade. The Camelot years of the Kennedy Presidency—and especially the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962—effectively represent the culmination of 1950s Cold War mentality, when most of this country accepted without question the moral righteousness of American government and lifestyle. We were the good guys in the

white hats, keeping the world safe from godless totalitarian communism. We lived in the “promised land,” the epitome of the good life, with a car in every suburban garage and two plump chickens in every pot.

Although the glamour and sheer “prettiness” of JFK and Jackie sparked the beginnings of a “youth culture” that would later rise up (first peacefully, then in anger), those first three years of the 1960s represented a transitional phase. Yes, the Kennedys were young and beautiful, but in ways that resonated to 1950s ideals. (All that would come crashing down in Dallas with televised images of Jackie’s blood-stained pink dress.) So, while setting the stage for what was to come, Camelot still embodied the last waves of post-World War II trust in authority, civil obedience, and social conformity.

The “Consciousness Revolution” of the ’60s would reverse those trends (at least temporarily) with shocking challenges to previously accepted assumptions that came seemingly out of left field—mistrust of authority, civil disobedience, and social nonconformity.

This wrenching shift began with JFK’s assassination in 1963, geared up in earnest in 1965, peaked from 1967-1970, then spread out in waves through 1973. So the period of confrontation was indeed just about a decade long, but shifted away from the beginning years of the 1960s to include the early years of the 1970s. Commentary about the social unrest, protest, and violence of the ’60s usually refers to the first half of the period (starting with the Los Angeles race riots in Watts in August 1965, and culminating with the National Guard killing of four students during a demonstration against the Vietnam War at Kent State University in May 1970). Discussions of the peaceful and often superficial cultural effects of ’60s phenomena (long hair, bell bottom jeans, marijuana, etc.) refer more to the early 1970s, as its waves broadened out and were absorbed into the larger society.

Considered from an astrological perspective, the central event of the 1960s occurred over the 15 months from spring 1965 through the summer of 1966, when Uranus conjoined Pluto and both outer planets opposed Saturn in the heavens along the Virgo-Pisces axis. That alignment carried an unprecedented magnitude in its implications for individual human consciousness and for civilization as a whole. While the 20th century was pockmarked by events of stunning magnitude, I consider the mid-1960s to be the fulcrum, the central tipping point between civilization’s past and future. That time was not only ground zero for a cultural earthquake whose effects (and counter-effects) would ripple out into manifestation for years after, it also revealed previously unforeseen concerns that would grow in importance through our lifetimes—ecology, globalization, sustainable economics, etc.

From a social viewpoint, finding a central pivot for the ’60s is difficult. The sheer number of new developments that occurred from one year to the next during that whole period, as well as the snowballing effects of their significance, makes a single pivotal year hard to nail down. In terms of politics, the most likely candidate is 1968, which saw the student-worker revolt in Paris, the freedom uprising in Czechoslovakia so harshly put down by Soviet tanks, the Tet offensive in Vietnam that marked a turning point in that tragic war, and in America the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, topped off by the appalling spectacle of riots and bloodshed at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. The biggest cultural peaks, however, followed the next year in 1969, with the last gasp of peace and love at Woodstock and the historic first Moon landing, both of which stood out as islands of tranquility and hope amidst increasingly stormy seas.

THE FUTURE CONNECTION

The ’60s revolution is connected to another period that still lies ahead, but not very far into the future, another time of great upheaval. Though precursors are already apparent, the coming phase will heat up in 2008-2010, hit critical mass dramatically in 2012-2015, then fan out in ripple effects from 2016-2022.

We don’t yet have a name for this coming period. I suppose we could call those years the “20-teens,” but that is an inelegant moniker at best. I prefer to crib the title of James Howard Kunstler’s book (coined by him to denote the crisis that will come with the end of cheap fossil fuels), “The Long Emergency.”

These two time frames are linked astrologically as specific phase shifts of the Uranus-Pluto cycle. This series of essays explores how the two periods are related and how they may differ.

THE QUESTION OF VIOLENCE

The 1960s are often described as a violent era. In some ways, that's anomalous, given the collective violence of the previous 50 years of the 20th century, which was unprecedented in human history. Two world wars, mass famines, disease pandemics, political purges, and racial pogroms cut short the lives of almost 200 million human beings between 1914 and 1965. By those standards, the '60s were a virtual picnic, a walk in the park.

In America at least, most of the characterizations of the '60s as "violent" refer not to numbers killed or to the extent of mass violence, but rather to the "psychic shock" of the period, which—like a rollercoaster ride—was exhilarating for some and nauseating for others. Many Americans are still disturbed by the confrontational atmosphere of the 1960s, the "in your face" attitude that was part of the protests—not merely in political demonstrations against the Vietnam War, but in the pointed celebration of being "different," the boisterous coming out that included both obvious joy and long-held anger on the part of freaks, feminists, and fags. The bedrock of stable society, as well as some of its cherished illusions, was cracked wide open. A powerful conservative backlash has tried to glue together that broken Humpty Dumpty in the ensuing decades, using "all the King's horses" (corporatization) and "all the King's men" (militarization). The apparent success of that reactionary movement is impressive, but it may turn out to be surprisingly short-lived.

In Part One of this essay, I discussed the Cultural Revolution in China. (If you are a new subscriber or didn't read that newsletter, I urge you to do so by going to my web site, where Part One is archived.) That event, more savage than anything that occurred in the western world, was violent to the point of mass hysteria.

Certainly America was a safer place to be than China in the 1960s. But was it actually less violent? Well, yes and no. The difference is that we exported our bloodlust in a foreign war. 58,000 American soldiers died in Vietnam, sacrificed at the false altar of Cold War Domino Theory, along with three million Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians. China, however, was still a closed and crippled society, and had again turned inward to implement the new communist ideology.

So why did the youth movement in America produce hippies and yippies who protested and paraded but did little actual damage, while China's youth movement produced the scourge of the Red Guards, who terrorized that country's entire urban population?

For one thing, America was a rich nation, while China was poor. Yes, inequality and injustice were an ongoing part of the American experience, but they simmered beneath the surface. Left intact and relatively unharmed as the ultimate victor of World War II, America had fostered a burgeoning middle class of very satisfied consumers, so that a large percentage of our population was quite happy with the state of affairs, thank you very much. Homes in the suburbs, washers and dryers, and television were opiates for the American masses. And for good reason: Human beings have lusted for such creature comforts since the dawn of civilization 10,000 years ago, which came about because our desire for dependable sources of grain to ferment into alcohol led to the beginnings of agriculture.

China had more people in dire poverty than the U.S. had people altogether. The impoverishment of China's rural population had been institutionalized by feudal dynasties over thousands of years and held a death-grip on the country. For America, growth and change were fundamental processes of her brief history, whereas continuity and passive acceptance were deeply embedded in the Chinese oversoul. In the conflict between Saturn (tradition, authority, stability) and Uranus (newness, rebellion, change) which has dramatically affected civilization since Uranus' discovery in 1781, America was always at the forefront of modernity. China struggled desperately to break its own rigid mold and catch up.

So, when Uranus conjoined Pluto opposite Saturn in 1965-1966 and the raw power of mass revolution confronted the status quo authority, America and China were like two buildings in an earthquake, one designed to withstand the shock, the other not. China's respect for authority turned on itself and her whole structure came crashing down, while America's flexible freedoms and cushioned comforts allowed her structure to vibrate wildly but remain standing.

MASS PSYCHOLOGY AND MIND-CONTROL

Further, America's awakening during the Saturn-Uranus-Pluto confrontation of the '60s was a grass roots movement, emerging from the bottom up. China's turmoil was state-invoked, descending from the top down. This is a crucial distinction. America's impatient young rebels challenged cultural mores and the authority of "the Establishment," but with only limited and temporary success. China's radical rulers initiated deliberate governmental policies aimed at undermining the stability of their entire society by manipulating idealistic but naive youth, with stunning if inadvertently tragic results.

If we look only to America and the western world to understand the 1960s, we lose sight of the bigger picture. Despite some people's dismissal of the '60s as silly, misguided, or immature, what happened in China shows us that something extremely serious was going on, something we must not take lightly.

I have written before, in earlier essays and in different contexts, that the great triumph of 20th-century psychology occurred not in the therapeutic fields of mental health and individual well-being, but in the nitty-gritty industrial psychology of mass manipulation and group mind-control. For all its sophistication and theories, psychotherapy has been largely a failed experiment, whereas the more mundane and crude commercial inducements of marketing and advertising have been a phenomenal success—not merely to sell products, but to sell ideas and shape opinion in the public mind. Psychology discovered that effectively manipulating individual human beings is difficult, but manipulating masses of human beings is easy, almost child's play.

The Cultural Revolution in China was the perfect example of a ruling elite using the fear-based mass psychology of collective mind-control to terrifying effect. And that is relevant to at least one aspect of the multifaceted changes already underway that will accelerate dramatically in the years ahead.

The collision between totalitarian control and individual freedom is built into the symbolic meanings of the Pluto-Uranus cycle. Consider the Patriot Act and other draconian measures enacted by the federal government in the wake of 9-11. Observe the mainstream media, which now functions as an organ of government and corporate propaganda. Will the forces that seek control and conformity under the guise of providing an altogether illusory "security" succeed in turning America into a police state?

That is certainly a possibility, one that will increase after Pluto enters Capricorn in 2008. As we reach critical mass in the coming breakdown of society's major institutions, efforts to maintain control on the part of elites in power will take ever more desperate forms.

In balance, however, I do not currently believe that we will see the dark descent of Orwellian-style fascism, for the simple reason that events are likely to spiral out of control. All our complex systems—from the military through the political to the corporate—are already showing signs of stress and disintegration, much to the chagrin of those who wish to maintain the status quo. Few outright institutional collapses have yet occurred, but those will accelerate after 2008, reaching full-bore in 2012-2015. By the time the powers-that-be feel the urgent need to play their hand through outright repression, they may no longer possess sufficient means to do so. Even if such attempts are made, by then it might be too late to muzzle an alarmed population whose misplaced faith in the corporate state will have been shattered where it counts—in their wallets.

THE STORM AND THE RAINBOW

Hurricane Katrina and the destruction of New Orleans showed us a prescient sneak preview of what is to come. Six months after the hurricane, the federal government is still paralyzed in dealing successfully (or at all) with the chaos. This is true also of the state government of Louisiana and large bureaucracies such as the Red Cross. The current relief efforts on the ground are being led by hundreds of smaller, often ad hoc organizations and by tens of thousands of concerned individuals who are contributing their time, expertise, resources, and often their bodies (by actually going to New Orleans) to address the devastation, help real people through their troubles, and resurrect the city.

Imagine such an upwelling on a much larger scale. In New Orleans' case, the trigger was a combination of two powerful forces—a natural disaster augmented by the incompetence of government. Many different

triggers may combine to cause social breakdowns in the decade ahead. We already know the list too well—ecological disasters, disease pandemics, war and nuclear terrorism, spiraling energy prices, etc. The triggers themselves, however, while unpleasant to contemplate, are less important than our responses.

Rather than the hundreds of small organizations and thousands of individuals now going to aid New Orleans, imagine a scenario involving tens of thousands of small and nimble organizations arising in response to broader crises of social breakdown, with millions of individuals devoting themselves to healing the wounds. Such spontaneous movements would represent an outpouring of creativity, care, and cooperation on a scale unprecedented in history.

Why will this be necessary? Because, at its essence, the coming crisis is economic. Pluto's passage into Capricorn makes that starkly clear. Politics and government are increasingly subservient to unsustainable economics. The shocking transfer of wealth upwards in society into the coffers of huge multinational corporations through globalization and what is laughingly called "free trade" is a recipe for disaster, one that is already too far advanced after 40 years to be recalled. Apocalyptic scenarios are not even required for a crisis to occur. Simply follow the money.

America is bankrupting herself. We are headed inexorably toward a financial meltdown that may or may not begin here, but will eventually affect markets throughout the world. No one yet knows how severe the resulting depression might be (it could appear relatively mild), nor how sudden (it might occur gradually, in fits and starts). The likely outcome by 2012-2015, however, when Uranus squares Pluto, is that monolithic institutions of government and mass commerce will be seriously crippled, perhaps even paralyzed. In that event, society will come apart, reorganizing around smaller localities that will effectively be on their own to pick up the pieces. And they will, although with greater ease in some places than others.

Like the '60s, which saw the first wave of protests against the corruption of unsustainable economics, the period immediately ahead of us feels revolutionary—unsettling and wrenching and at times violent. Unlike the 1960s, however, this drama will not pit young versus old. What is coming is not a generational confrontation; it will cut across all age-related cohorts. As the economic crisis deepens, the current polarization of political and religious ideologies will wane toward irrelevance. The culture wars will end, trumped by our urgent need to band together. Pragmatism—finding what works to adapt to a new way of life—will be the underlying theme of this "enforced simplification" of society as creative alliances are forged at grass roots levels.

The rainbow that could emerge out of the storm is a rebirth of community. Those who are worried about our collective future can take some solace in the hope that the benefits of locally-based kinship may overturn the current alienation of postmodern America. However unpleasant the triggers may be, that rebirth will occur out of simple necessity. In the same way that grass pushes up through cracks in the concrete, so the need to help one another in human fellowship will push up through the cracks of our inadvertent self-destructiveness to flower once again.



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